

Osteoporosis: What You Should Know



Women can lose up to 20 percent of their bone mass in the five to seven years following menopause, making them more susceptible to osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis is a disease characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, leading to bone fragility and an increased susceptibility to fractures, especially of the hip, spine, and wrist, although any bone can be affected. Osteoporosis is a major public health threat for 55 percent of Americans 50 years of age or older. In the U.S. today, 10 million individuals are estimated to already have the disease and almost 34 million more are estimated to have low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for osteoporosis. Of the 10 million Americans estimated to have osteoporosis, eight million are women.

Risk Factors:

Certain people are more likely to develop osteoporosis than others. Factors that increase the likelihood of developing osteoporosis are called "risk factors." These risk factors include:

- Personal history of fracture after age 50
- Current low bone mass
- History of fracture in a 1st degree relative
- Being female
- Being thin and/or having a small frame
- Advanced age
- A family history of osteoporosis
- Estrogen deficiency as a result of menopause, especially early or surgically induced
- Abnormal absence of menstrual periods
- Anorexia nervosa
- Low calcium intake over a lifetime
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Use of certain medications, such as corticosteroids and anticonvulsants
- Presence of certain chronic medical conditions
- An inactive lifestyle
- Current cigarette smoking
- Excessive use of alcohol
- Being Caucasian or Asian, although African Americans and Hispanic Americans are at significant risk as well

Symptoms:

Osteoporosis is often called the "silent disease" because bone loss occurs without symptoms. People may not know that they have osteoporosis until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump, or fall causes a fracture or a vertebra to collapse. Collapsed vertebrae may initially be felt or seen in the form of severe back pain, loss of height, or spinal deformities such as kyphosis or stooped posture.

Prevention:

By about age 20, the average woman has acquired 98 percent of her skeletal mass. Building strong bones during childhood and adolescence can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis later. There are four steps which together can optimize bone health and help prevent osteoporosis. They are:

- A balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D;
- Weight-bearing exercise;
- A healthy lifestyle with no smoking or excessive alcohol intake; and
- Bone density testing and medication, when appropriate.

Fractures:

One in two women and one in four men over age 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture in their remaining lifetime. Osteoporosis is responsible for more than 1.5 million fractures annually, including:

- over 300,000 hip fractures; and approximately
- 700,000 vertebral fractures;
- 250,000 wrist fractures; and
- 300,000 fractures at other sites.

Additional Resources:

National Osteoporosis Foundation	www.nof.org
American Society for Bone and Mineral Research	www.asbmr.org
National Resource Center, National Osteoporosis Foundation	www.osteoporosis.org/

For More Information:

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